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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationships between four independent variables and a fifth dependent variable - juvenile delinquency. The four independent variables were: (1) perception by youth of parental acceptance or rejection; (2) normative orientation of parents--conformist or deviant; (3) normative orientation of reference others--conformist or deviant; and (4) the primary source of youth identification--parent or reference others. A theory was developed linking these five factors. Questionnaires were administered to 640 boys and girls in the ninth through the twelfth grades in three high schools and two drop-in centers in North Dakota. Findings revealed that responses to the four independent variables did discriminate between the respondents according to their extent of delinquency involvement. The normative orientation of the youths reference others proved to be the best predictor followed by the parent-child relationships identification of the youth with reference others and parents delinquency. A multiple regression analysis revealed that all four of the independent variables acting together explained R=.605 of the variance in the dependent variable. A configuration table depicting all possible outcomes between the independent variables and the dependent variables indicated linearity and proved to be useful in predicting delinquent or conformist behavior. (Author)

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"PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS PARENTAL ROLE MODELS AND REFERENCE OTHERS -THEIR JOINT IMPACT ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY"

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PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ROLE MODELS
THEIR IMPACT ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

I. Introduction

This study was prompted by the question, "what factors propel youngsters toward and away from delinquent behavior?" Why is it that many youngsters reared in highly criminogenic surroundings do not become delinquent while some youngsters reared in "law abiding" surroundings become delinquent? What are these key factors that make one youngster vulnerable to juvenile delinquency but insulate another from participating in delinquent behavior? (Reckless and Dinitz, 1967.) It is the premise of this paper that certain key factors are highly predictive of future delinquent or conformist behavior.[1] A review of the delinquency literature revealed four such key factors which seem to play a significant role in either insulating a youngster from or making a youngster vulnerable to delinquent behavior.

1. Behavioral Norms of Reference Others

Sutherland, in his theory of Differential Association, indicated "a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law." He further pointed out that "when persons become criminal they do so because of contacts with criminal patterns and also because of isolation from anti-criminal patterns. Any person inevitably assimilates the surrounding culture unless other patterns are in conflict." (1970:76.) It seems to follow that if a youth associates with others who espouse law violating norms that the youth will come to espouse those same norms; on the other hand if law abiding norms are predominant the youngster is likely to be law abiding.

As Glaser (1969) points out, however, it is not merely the presence or absence of these differential associations which determine criminal behavior but whether the individual comes to identify with others who espouse criminal or conformist behavioral norms. Identification is defined as "the choice of another from whose perspective we view our own behavior." (1969:525.) These groups or individuals with whom the youngster "identifies" become his or her reference group or reference others. It is only through this process of identification that "others" become "reference others;" once reference others have been established there is an internalization by the youngster of the values, norms, and attitudes of the reference others. The first key factor is, then, the behavioral norms of reference others.

2. Parental Norms of Behavior

For most youngsters parents are reference others. The normative behavior of the parents has previously been shown to be related to the delinquency or non-delinquency of the youngster. For example, the Gleucks found that delinquents "are to a greater extent than non-delinquents the sons of delinquent fathers, and this means that rearing by a father who is or has been a criminal does indeed have some bearing on the delinquency of the son." (1962.) And the McCords found that even though a father was considered "criminal" if he was warm in his relationship to his son the chances of the son being delinquent

[1] The terms "conformist" or "delinquent" imply that behavior is always either law abiding or law violating and that youngsters may be classified according to one or the other of these two extremes. Obviously, it would be preferable to indicate gradations along a behavior continuum; however, for purposes of the conceptualization of this paper we must force the dichotomy.

were diminished. However, if the father was rejecting of the son and the father was a criminal role model there was a tendency for the son to also engage in criminal behavior. If both the father and mother were deviant role models the chances were even greater that the son would be delinquent. (McCord, 1969). Tec also found that "children whose parents used legal drugs show a higher level of involvement with an illegal drug, such as marijuana." (1972.) It would appear, then, that the behavioral norms of the parents should be considered as a key factor which might discriminate between the delinquency and non-delinquency prone youngster.

3. Source of Identification

Even while a youngster is quite young, he or she is exposed to social relationships outside the family. As a youngster grows older, these outside the family influences, both peer and adult, tend to exert a greater and greater influence on the socialization of the child. The question then arises: if there is a conflict between the parent's behavioral expectations and the reference others behavioral expectations with whom does the youngster identify? If the youngster identifies with reference others, the behavior condoned by that group will be seen as acceptable by the youth; if the youth identifies with the parents, the behavior condoned by the parents will be seen as acceptable by the youth. At times, when there is a conflict between parental and reference other expectations the youngster is forced to make a decision. The question is "with which group does the youngster identify?"

4. Parent-Child Relationship

A long line of sociological, psychological and psychiatric studies have indicated the importance of the parent-child relationship in promoting or impeding delinquent behavior. (Gleuck, 1962: McCords, 1959: Clark, 1972: Medinnus, 1965.) Several studies have indicated that a poor parent-child relationship is associated with delinquent behavior. For instance, Nye found that the "data supported the hypothesis that rejection of parents by children is related to delinquent behavior. Significant relationship was found between delinquent behavior and attitudes in boys and girls toward each parent." (1958.)

These four factors: Behavioral Norms of Reference Others, Parental Norms of Behavior, Source of Identification, and the Parent-Child Relationship have all been shown in previous studies to be related to a fifth dependent factor - the delinquent or conformist behavior of the youth.

II. Theory and Hypotheses

In order to conceptualize inter-relationships between these five factors a theory was developed.

I. Youth in the process of socialization into the adult world, encounter diverse groups and individuals.

II. Behavioral norms of these groups or individuals may be considered "conformist" or "delinquent" compared to the behavioral norms of the greater society.

III. Youth, as social beings, require and seek out acceptance by groups and individuals.

IV. Upon perceiving acceptance, youth, in the absence of more satisfying relationships, come to identify with the behavioral norms of those groups or individuals with whom the youth identifies; these groups and individuals are transformed into reference others for the youth.

V. The family of orientation is the primary reference other for the youth.

VI. If the youth perceives acceptance from the family of orientation the youth will primarily identify with the behavioral norms of the family.

VII. If the youth perceives rejection from the family of orientation, the youth is propelled into seeking acceptance and consequently primary identification with alternative groups and individuals.

VIII. Both the "rejected" and the "accepted" youth, in the process of socialization into the adult world, seek out alternative sources of acceptance but will tend to identify with those groups of individuals, if available, espousing behavioral norms similar to those of the family of orientation.

IX. The "accepted" youth will tend to express the behavioral norms of the family whereas the "rejected" youth will tend to express the behavioral norms of the reference others.

X. The youth will continue to identify with the family or with the reference others and their respective behavioral norms as long as continued acceptance is perceived.

The theory is diagramatically presented in Figure 1.

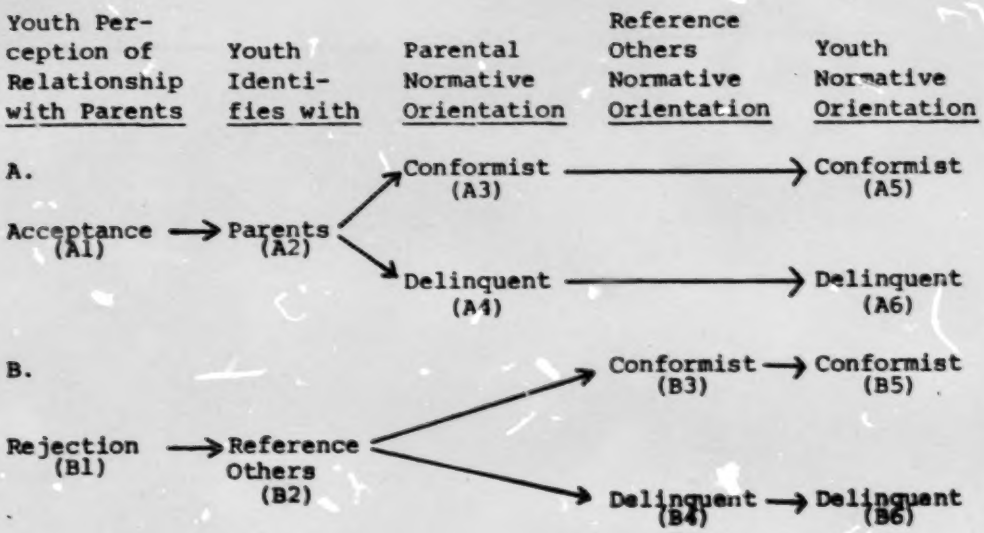

Figure 1. Depiction of Theory in Model Form

The model indicates that the youth who perceives acceptance tends to identify with his or her parents and assumes the behavioral norms of the parents; youth who perceive parental rejection identify with reference others and assume the behavioral norms of those reference others. However, the model does not accurately present the theory because all of the relationships existing between the variables are not depicted.

Consequently, a hypothetical configuration table has been developed in order to depict all hypothesized outcomes. (See Figure 2.) The table depicts the thirty-two possible paths that can be derived from linking the four independent factors with the fifth dependent factor.

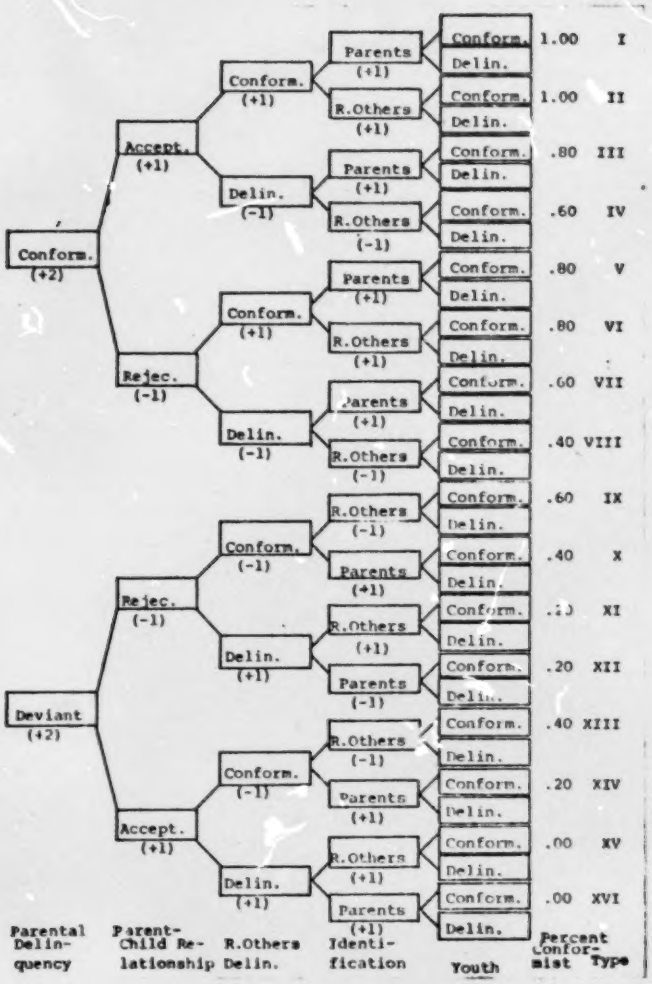

Figure 2. Configuration Table Depicting Theory

The usual procedure in developing a configuration table is to determine the degree of relationship existing between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable. It is anticipated that each of the independent variables will predict a certain amount of variance in the dependent variable. The independent variable that appears to predict the greatest amount of variance is utilized as the initial variable in the configuration table. Each succeeding step in the configuration table is based on the relative superiority of each of the remaining independent variables to explain the variance in the dependent variable. The final result is a configuration table which should depict all possible outcomes in a linear fashion.

The configuration table as presented in Figure 2 was developed on the basis of the theory as previously set forth. It is hypothesized that the norms of behavior of the parents (parental delinquency) will be the best predictor followed by the nature of the parent-child relationship, the norms of behavior of the reference others and the source of identification. It is noted that the configuration table predicts linearity, i.e., the chances of being conformist are 100% for path number I and 00% for path number XVI. It is noted that figures 1 and 2 are somewhat inconsistent in that the ordering of variables has been altered for Figure 2; this change was necessary in order to depict a linear outcome pattern ranging from least delinquent (conformist) to most delinquent.

Formal hypotheses were developed to test the key propositions in the theory as well as the degree of linearity in the configuration table.

III. Data and Methodology

In order to test the theory a questionnaire was administered to approximately 650 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade students in two urban communities and one rural community in North Dakota. Questionnaires were administered to two classes in each of the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in the more urban schools and to all high school students in the more rural community. Youth who were considered "probable delinquents" and who attended two community "Drop-In-Centers" in the urban communities were also included in order to insure the inclusion of sufficient "delinquent" youngsters in the total sample. A proportion of approximately 50% boys and 50% girls was maintained across all sub-samples.

The questionnaire was designed to measure the four independent and one dependent variables. The questionnaires were completed anonymously and students were instructed to seal their completed questionnaires in a plain white envelope and place them in a "ballot box." The questionnaire was composed of seven sections. In the first section certain identifying data, such as youngsters age, sex, grade in school, and family background, was requested. The second section was designed to determine the youth's reference others. The format was in keeping with the Significant Others Test as developed by H. L. Mulford. (Brooks, 1963.) The student was asked to indicate, by initials, the names of three persons who are "very important to you." They were requested not to list their parents. These three persons were defined as the reference others.

The third section of the questionnaire dealt with the identification process. The student was asked to complete a number of statements, such as, "I can confide in...." through indicating their first choice by placing a "1" in the column of one of the reference others or the column for either the father or mother. Similarly they would indicate their second through fifth choices. Other items included, "I want to be like...." "I am like...." "My attitude about the police is similar to...." The scores for each of the five individuals (reference others and parents) were tabulated; those persons receiving the lowest average score were considered to be the source of closest identification. The data was then dichotomized into "parents" and "reference other" groupings.

The nature of the parent-child relationship was assessed by utilizing the "parent-rejection scale" as developed by F. Ivan Nye (1958). That instrument calls for the student to respond to such questions as: "Do you enjoy letting your mother in on your 'big' moments?" or "Are you interested in what your mother thinks of you?" Students are asked to complete the instrument by checking several possible outcomes such as, "very much," "somewhat," "hardly at all," and "not at all." Separate questionnaire items were included for both the father and the mother.

The behavioral norms of the youth were assessed by utilizing a self admitted delinquency questionnaire. The Nye-Short (1957) questionnaire items were generally used. However, those questions relating to sex offenses were deleted and questions relating to the use or sale of marijuana and drugs were added. Whereas the Nye-Short study requested the youngster to indicate those offenses "you have committed since beginning grade school" the present study asked the youth to indicate the number of times he or she has committed these offenses "during the past three years."

The normative behavior of the parents and reference others was assessed by asking the youngster to indicate whether he or she "thinks" that his father or mother has committed certain acts. The actual questionnaire was derived from several of the Nye-Short items, the "theft scale" items developed by Dentler and Monroe (1961) and several questions related to alcoholism and previous incarcerations.

Wherever possible, questions were scaled and validity and reliability checks were made. Any questionnaires which led the researcher to believe that the student was either exaggerating or minimizing his or her responses were deleted from the study. A total of 13 of the 653 questionnaires were deleted from the study due to these reasons or because the respondent was not able or not willing to complete the questionnaire according to the instructions.

IV. Findings

Six specific hypotheses were set forth in null hypothesis form. Each of these hypotheses relates to propositions in the theory.

1. THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NORMATIVE ORIENTATION OF THE YOUTH AND THE NORMATIVE ORIENTATION OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS WITH WHOM THE YOUTH IDENTIFIES.

   It was found that the behavior norms of the youth are correlated with the behavioral norms of those individuals or groups with whom the youth identifies (Proposition IV); the greater the delinquent behavioral norms of the source of identification the greater the delinquency of the youth. Table I indicates the relationship between the youth's delinquency and the delinquency of the parents and reference others after controlling for the source of identification.

	Youth Delinquency	
	Identification with Parents	Identification with Ref. Others
Parents Delinquency	r_s=.344 N = 229 Sig=.001	r_s=.244 N = 390 Sig=.001
Reference Others Delinquency	r_s=.624 N = 229 Sig=.001	r_s=.531 N = 390 Sig=.001

Table I. Youth Delinquency by Parents and Reference Others Delinquency Controlling for Youth Identification

It is noted that if the youth identifies with parents that the correlation between the youth's delinquency and the parent's delinquency is r_s=.344 as opposed to r_s=.244 when the youth identifies with reference others. If the youth identifies with reference others the correlation between the youth's delinquency and the reference other's delinquency increases dramatically to r_s=.531. However, the relationship between youth delinquency and reference other's delinquency, even though the youth identifies with parents, also increases dramatically to r_s=.624. It is obvious, then, that the youth's delinquency is more highly correlated with the delinquency scores of reference others than it is with the parent's delinquency scores. Regardless, it appears that the youth's delinquency is more positively correlated with the parent's delinquency if the youth identifies with the parent than if he or she doesn't identify with the parents. If the youth identifies with the reference others the correlation with the other's delinquency is not enhanced but rather slightly diminished. There does appear to be a direct relationship between the normative orientation of the youth and the normative orientation of those individuals or

groups which whom the youth identifies. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

2. THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE YOUTH'S PERCEIVED SENSE OF ACCEPTANCE BY PARENTS AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE YOUTH WITH HIS OR HER PARENTS.

The second hypothesis (Proposition VI) was tested and it was found that the correlation between parent relationship and identification with parents was r_s=.499 at a significance level of .001; on the other hand, the correlation of identification with reference others was r_s=-.455. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted - it appears that the greater the youth's perception of a sense of acceptance from his or her parents, the greater the degree of identification of the youth with his or her parents.

3. THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE YOUTH'S PERCEPTION OF A SENSE OF REJECTION BY HIS OR HER PARENTS AND THE DEGREE OF IDENTIFICATION OF THE YOUTH WITH REFERENCE OTHERS.

The third hypothesis (Proposition VII) predicted that the greater the youth's perception of rejection by his or her parents, the greater the degree of identification of the youth with reference others. This hypothesis is essentially the inverse of hypothesis 2. It was found that the correlation between a rejecting parent-child relationship and identification with reference others was significant at the .001 level with a correlation coefficient of r_s=.473. Inversely, the relationship between rejection and identification with parents is r_s=-.506. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis may be accepted - the greater the youth's perception of rejection by his or her parents, the greater the degree of identification of the youth with reference others. It was also noted that the relationship with father was more highly correlated with a sense of parental rejection or acceptance than was the relationship with mother.

4. THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NORMATIVE ORIENTATION OF PARENTS AND THE NORMATIVE ORIENTATION OF REFERENCE OTHERS.

The alternate hypothesis (Proposition VIII) predicts that the normative orientation of the parents is directly related to the normative orientation of reference others. The correlation between the parent's delinquency scores and the reference other's delinquency scores was significant at the .001 level with a spearman rank correlation coefficient of .208. Although the correlation is fairly low the alternate hypothesis may be accepted.

5. FOR THOSE YOUTH WHO PERCEIVE ACCEPTANCE FROM THEIR PARENTS THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NORMATIVE ORIENTATION OF THE PARENTS AND THAT OF THE YOUTH.

6. FOR THOSE YOUTH WHO PERCEIVE REJECTION BY THEIR PARENTS THERE IS NO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NORMATIVE ORIENTATION OF THE REFERENCE OTHERS AND THAT OF THE YOUTH.

The fifth and sixth null hypotheses (Proposition IX) predict that even though a youth perceives acceptance that no significant relationship exists between the behavioral norms of the parents and those of the youth; if a youth perceives rejection no significant relationship exists between the behavioral norms of the reference others and those of the youth. Table II indicates that if a youngster perceives acceptance, a higher correlation (r_s=.31) is attained between the parent's delinquency and the youth's delinquency than if the youngster perceives rejection (r_s=.16). Consequently, the fifth null hypothesis must

be discarded.

	Youth Delinquency		
	Perception of Acceptance	Perception of Rejection	Total Sample
Parents Delinquency	r_s=.310 N = 445 Sig=.001	r_s=.157 N = 174 Sig=.001	r_s=.305 N = 619 Sig=.001
Reference Others Delinquency	r_s=.589 N = 445 Sig=.001	r_s=.446 N = 174 Sig=.001	r_s=.598 N = 619 Sig=.001

Table II. Parents and Reference Others Delinquency by Youth Delinquency (controlling for Parent Relationship).

However, the perception of rejection does not result in a higher correlation between the youth's delinquency and the delinquency of reference others. Indeed, that correlation (r_s=.45) is less than the correlation noted between the two variables when the youth perceives acceptance (r_s=.59). Nevertheless, a positive correlation has been found between youth delinquency and reference other delinquency; consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. For those youth who perceive parental acceptance there is a correlation between youth delinquency and parent delinquency. For those youth who perceive reference others acceptance there is a correlation between reference others delinquency and youth delinquency.

It was also hypothesized that the data would "fit" the configuration table as depicted in Figure II and that the thirty-two possible outcomes would show linearity ranging from a low percentage of conformity at the bottom of the configuration table to a high percentage at the top. Figure III depicts the table that was developed from the actual data. It is noted that the table generally shows linearity and analysis of variance indicates that the linearity is significant at the .001 level. However, there are some inconsistencies or reversals in the linearity for some of the outcomes. Consequently, a multiple regression analysis was done; this analysis revealed that each of the four key factors correlated with the delinquent behavior of the youth. Some of the factors were able to explain more of the variance in the dependent variable than were others. For instance, the delinquent behavior of reference others was found to be the "most powerful" variable (Beta=.38), followed by nature of the parent-child relationship (Beta=.23). Both the normative orientation of the parents (Beta=.14) and the source of the youth's identification (Beta=.15) also explain some of the variance and therefore have limited predictor ability. All four of the independent variables working in concert were able to explain much (R=.60) of the variance in the dependent variable.

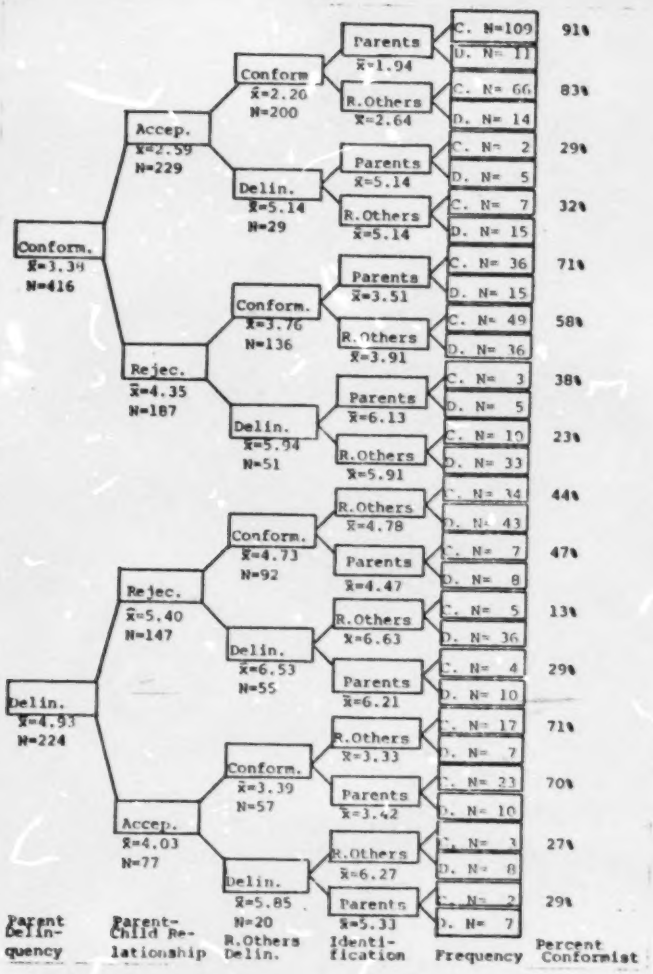

Figure 3. Configuration Table - Testing Theoretical Model

In light of this information, the configuration table was reconstructed utilizing the reference others delinquency as the primary indicator followed by parent-child relationship, parent's delinquency and source of identification. (See Figure IV.)

The configuration table indicates that those youngsters who prefer reference others who are conformists, who perceive acceptance from their parents, whose parents are conformist and who identify with their parents, are almost totally insulated from delinquency (91% conformist). On the other hand, those youngsters who prefer reference others who are delinquent, who perceived rejection from their parents, whose parents were perceived as delinquent, and who identified with their reference others were almost totally insulated from conformity (12% conformist). Although there are some inconsistancies in the linearity for the 32 possible outcomes the general pattern is quite consistent.

The addition of each variable to the table provides increased information and further discriminates between the "delinquent" and "conformist" youth. For example, following the top "path" in the table we note that if the reference others are "conformist" the youth have, on an average, committed 3.26 delinquency acts. If a youth perceives parental acceptance the number of delinquent acts drops to 2.48. If the youth perceives his or her parents behavior as "conformist" the number of acts drops to 2.22; if he or she identifies with their parents the average number of delinquent acts drops

to 1.94. Only eleven of the one hundred twenty youngsters displaying these characteristics had committed enough delinquent acts to classify them as delinquent (4.17 or more). On the other hand, only five of the forty-one youngsters in the bottom path had not committed at least 4.17 delinquent acts.

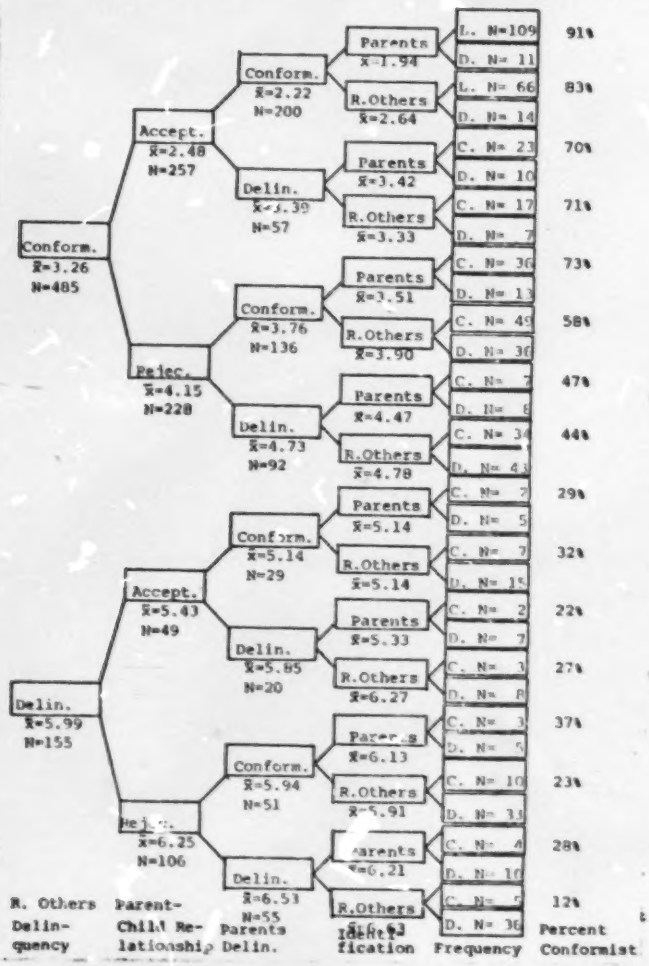

Figure 4. Configuration Table of Five Key Variables--Best Linear Model

V. Conclusions

The majority of the null hypotheses were not proved and therefore the alternative hypotheses can be accepted. Although some of the findings were contradictory or confusing the general conclusion is reached that the theory, until proven inaccurate, may be accepted. Knowledge of each of the four variables contributes to our overall knowledge of whether a youngster will be a "conformist" or "delinquent." All four variables working in concert explain roughly 60% of the "outcome;" obviously, there are other variables that play a significant role but are not included in the equation.

It must be pointed out that the configuration table should not be interpreted as a process model. No attempt has been made to determine which experience precedes which experience. For instance, does the delinquency of the youth result from a poor parent-child relationship or does the poor parent-child relationship result from the youth's delinquency? It is probable that there is an inter-relationship here which is not linear in either direction but more realistically should be conceptualized as a spiraling effect. Obviously, we have not controlled for feed-

back situations nor have interactive statistics been used. In any future study these possibilities should be considered.

In summary, the factors of reference others behavioral norms, the nature of the parent-child relationship, the behavioral norms of the parents, and the source of identification have all been found to be correlated with delinquency or conformity. Knowledge of each of these four independent variables aids us in understanding the dependent variable of juvenile delinquency or conformity.

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